

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for May 2, 2001

Agenda Items

- Scope Briefing on Northgate Alignment including Roosevelt and Northgate station siting options

Commissioners Present

Matthew Kitchen
Carolyn Law
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Mimi Sheridan
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign

Paul Tomita chaired the meeting in Rick Sundberg's absence. The meeting began with introductions, followed by review and approval of meeting notes for April 4th, 2001.

LRRP Business

Cheryl introduced Jim Parsons who provided the Panel with an update on the Sound Transit six month work plan, stating that a weekly progress report is prepared each Friday summarizing key efforts toward accomplishing work program objectives. He noted that when the Sound Transit Board adopted the work plan in January, it was with the intent of forming a technical advisory committee to monitor progress of plan implementation. Since then, the Project Review Committee has been formed with a broader scope and the work plan has adjusted accordingly. There are several major elements to the work plan:

- Project-wide issues
- University Link
- Airport Link
- Northgate Link
- Internal organization

Most of the work is related to University Link and looking at alternatives to save costs, reduce impacts, or improve cost effectiveness. Another major effort underway is re-exploration of joint bus/train operations in the downtown Seattle tunnel. Bus technology is evolving to the point where it is possible that a hybrid electric/diesel bus might be available in time for use in this project. This analysis will conclude in June. Other highlight of the work plan include:

- Potentially routing light rail through Convention Place Station, although not including a station there due to the tight curve and steep grade. The PRC is evaluating the pros and cons of this approach—although routing through CPS might save some expense and certainly reduce impacts of a cut and cover alignment on Pine/Pike Street, it also complicates the development project King County is proposing at the station.
- At NE 45th and First Hill we are re-examining ways to construct the stations to cut costs.
- The biggest and most complex change is on Capitol Hill, where a new alignment along Nagle Place is being considered. The biggest issues here being related to construction impacts on the business community. An SEIS will be issued in June.

- It is likely we will defer construction of the 520 vent shaft until tunnel operations of are such a magnitude to require it. This represents a cost savings.
- Reconfiguration of Pacific station at the platform level—keeping the station entrances as designed, but moving the tunnel slightly west.
- We're also considering alternatives to the Portage Bay tunnel such as a Montlake crossing, or high-level bridge alignment that bypasses First Hill and Capitol Hill station altogether. Under that scenario there might be stations at Denny Triangle and Eastlake. A Montlake alignment would cross under the Montlake Cut, cross the campus and rejoin the alignment at the point where Pacific station is currently proposed.
- Work on the Northgate Link is proceeding also, as you will hear tonight. The goal is to have an alignment chosen so that if funds become available, work can start right away.

The impact of the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General's report was to freeze funding to Sound Transit for 2001 and 2002 until certain conditions are met; notably consensus about what kind of system the region wants to build. In spite of the questions raised, there is still support for Link as a strong and worthy project, and \$500 million and a Full Funding Grant Agreement ready whenever we decide what to proceed with.

Cheryl asked if the tunnel station designs seen to date are likely to be completely redone or if some of that work is still valid. Debora answered that it really depends on the station, with Capitol Hill experiencing the most design change. She said ST will probably stay with the architectural teams they have. Cheryl also asked about the "Blue Book" to which Debora responded that it is still in production, but will be used as a background document for the PRC and the public.

Scope Briefing on Northgate Link

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit

Greg Ball, Sound Transit

Calvin Chow, SPO

Gabe Grijalva, PSTC

Kevin O'Neill, SPO

We are currently in conceptual engineering and recently submitted a preliminary draft SEIS to the City for review. PSTC is the civil engineer; Hewitt Architects is the lead architectural design consultant. In 1999 the ST Board chose not to select a final alignment, but indicated the Northgate Link is a high priority should additional funds become available. The issue is now back on the table for discussion because of the relevance of north portal location on the University Link segment. The draft SEIS will be published for public comment early June with a 45-day comment period; followed by an initial ST Board decision possibly on August 8th, publication of the final SEIS in October, and final ST Board decision in November. If funding becomes available, preliminary engineering work could begin as early as August.

We are considering three alternatives, all of which join into a common alignment at approximately 76th Street.

- A1.1—twin tunnels to a portal at 76th, with a station at the current QFC site at 66th. This would be an 80' deep station using the QFC site as both staging and mucking out location.
- A2.1b—tunnel to a portal between I-5 and the Ravenna off-ramp at approximately 63rd? This would necessitate building a temporary off-ramp during construction, with mucking out at the University Heights community center on NE 50th. The mucking out would not preclude

use of the University Heights building, but would require moving the Saturday Farmer's Market for the year or so during construction.

- A2.1c—tunnel to a portal on the east side of the Ravenna/65th off-ramp. Although this option does not impact the existing off-ramp, it does require more right-of-way property takes and a larger staging area.

In addition to deciding a preferred alignment and Roosevelt and Northgate station locations in August, the ST Board also has the option to simply elect to build to a north portal (instead of all the way to Northgate).

There are three station siting options being considered:

- A tunnel station at 12th Avenue—80' deep with a mezzanine at 30' and entrances at 65th and 67th, built as cut and cover and designed to structurally support overbuilding in the future, and with stairs, escalators, and elevators to the mezzanine and a then also to the platform.
- Two aerial stations options both interchangeable with the 8th Avenue alignment options; one designed as a center platform with entrances at 65th and 63rd, offset 20' from the freeway (minimum WSDOT clearance) with bus service, layover, and para-transit at the existing park and ride facility under the freeway. A right turn would be accommodated onto 65th as per Seatran's request. The side platform design would require more space/width, and moves the "pinchpoint" of congestion away from 65th but still remains close enough to make the connection with the business district.

Discussion

- For the 12th Avenue option, would the staging area occupy the full two blocks? *(We can save the bookstore on the corner and other buildings facing Roosevelt and 12th, but others on 65th would be demolished.)*
- How many houses would be taken under 2.1c versus 2.1b? *(18 residential properties for 2.1b, 29 for 2.1c.)*

At this point Gabe Grijalva presented more information about the alignment north of Roosevelt for the 8th Avenue options. He stated that coming out of the portal the track will transition to aerial, then into retained fill, then cut and cover under the Lake City Way off-ramp to NE 70th where it becomes aerial again at the same elevation as I-5 with a grade of 6%. LRRP discussion resumed.

- How do these alignments affect surrounding land uses and station area planning? *(With the 2.1b option, the land use could go back to what it was—residential. With the 2.1c, the houses couldn't be rebuilt. The community is concerned about keeping the residential character of the area intact, but it isn't certain whether anyone would choose to rebuild housing adjacent to I-5. Is it likely or not? We don't really know. Under 2.1c the land would remain under the guideway and not redevelop. 2.1b would build a temporary off-ramp and redirect traffic onto 8th Avenue with one-way operation to Ravenna. Then buildings would be demolished and portal construction begun. Afterwards, the ramp would be built to the same condition it is in now—although admittedly it is substandard now.)*
- Is this viewed as a multi-modal station? *(There are lots of bus routes that intersect here which will reconnect curbside or through the park and ride.)*
- I'm worried about increased vehicle traffic. Will 65th end up as nearly a dedicated transit route? *(Ridership projections are small here.)* Nonetheless, it seems to me that a "catchment" could exist here. If buses around Green Lake use the area around I-5 as a

catchment, then what about when more people are added for light rail? *(People do use the 450 spaces at the Roosevelt park and ride—it is always full. Lots of express buses here in the am/pm peak hours.)*

- How might existing bus service get reconfigured after light rail?
- Is there any discussion of rezoning the area between Roosevelt and I-5? *(It is hard to get the community to discuss this when the alignment isn't decided yet. We don't want to sap the business energy from Roosevelt by expanding commercial too much along 65th. There is in fact quite a bit of untapped zoning potential now.)*
- Doesn't this drive the alignment decision? *(Yes and no. One option has land largely under public ownership, while the other has land still held privately.)*
- We are starting to see more dense residential there.
- The community doesn't want to see Ravenna turned into a bus corridor—this is our scenic route and we prefer to keep the area residential. *(This comment from Larry Sinnett, community member.)*
- What percent of canopy coverage will you provide for the aerial station? *(We'll use the same formula as before, but in no case provide less than 30%. We have a higher chance of more canopy at Northgate because ridership will be so much higher there.)* My point is that using at-grade canopy coverage standards does not work for aerial stations.
- What are the benefits/disadvantages of a side vs. center aerial platform? *(A center platform is good for passengers in that they have a single larger platform vs. two smaller ones, but side platform is better from the standpoint of keeping tracks together, having fewer support columns, and taking less land. Although with side platforms one also has double the circulation costs (double sets of stairs, elevators, etc.)*
- WSDOT's requirement for capacity to expand I-5—is this related to the lane continuity issue? *(Yes.)*
- How long will the staging area be in operation? Especially if you end up only going to 76th? *(Possibly four years, but it is hard to say without more engineering work.)*
- So the QFC site would stay capped until later when you go to Northgate? *(Yes, although maybe some development could occur.)*
- Does the 12th Avenue staging area include 65th Street itself? *(Yes, there would be cut and cover on 65th.)*

Gabe then described the alignment past 76th as a combination of retained cut and retained fill, with cut and cover under the Lake City Way ramp. We would remove side street parking, and there would be impact to the park and ride lot because of guideway columns. A TPSS structure would be located at about 85th and 1st. The guideway then moves north to the 92nd underpass and transitions to aerial and crosses 1st to the Northgate parking lot and Metro transit center. For the Northgate station we have whittled down to three options from ten, largely possible because of the October 4th Northgate workshop. Option B1 sites the station on the east side of 1st Avenue, aligned next to the Metro transit station with a seven story parking garage for 1300 cars, at about the same height as the aerial guideway.

- Would there be joint development and operation of the garage with Metro? *(This hasn't been determined yet. King County wants to develop the south parking lot, but timing is tricky on this. They are preserving rail access but other decisions about their involvement haven't been made.)*

Option C2 has a station that straddles 103rd with an entry on either end—one end near the Metro transit center and another on the mall property. There are two parking structures in this option, both smaller than Option B1, with 850 spaces in one and 550 in another.

- What about the tail track? *(It stays elevated and stores trains, primarily at night when they are not in operation.)* Will this feel like an industrial train yard? *(It will look differently depending upon whether it is at-grade or aerial. Under the Option C3 the tail track is integrated into the parking structure.)*
- What are we screening the train cars from? The cars on the freeway? Is this an issue? *(Train storage would be mostly at night, during turn-around times, or breakdowns.)*
- Have the Northgate Mall owners participated in the parking garage discussion? Shoppers will be using that parking garage too! *(Actually the community doesn't want to overbuild parking, preferring to have as much joint use as possible.)*
- I remember Mary Jo Porter saying at a community meeting that Sound Transit isn't necessarily invested in having its own parking, and agreed with citizens about not maximizing parking. This should be addressed in the SEIS. *(As a terminus, we need more parking than as a stop on a longer system.)*
- Has there been any discussion of moving the transit center nearer to the train? *(Yes, that was a feature of earlier schemes, but the designs showed a lot of impacts to intersections that Seatran wasn't comfortable with.)*
- There needs to be a connection regardless. Who is responsible for the parking structure?
- Pay more attention to how you get from the train to the bus, and bus to train. Have Seatran examine transit-preferred signalization. Or, failing that, put parking under the tracks. *(That might be difficult given the community desire to daylight Thornton Creek.)* No, I mean above-grade but below the tracks—sort of a mezzanine level.
- Why is there such deference and concern over impacts to the small strip development alongside 1st? e.g. in not allowing an option which brings the guideway across 1st earlier and thus closer to the transit station. *(Actually the concern isn't just the existing businesses, but the knowledge that putting the station and guideway over that property—which is zoned to 85'—precludes any future development there. One of the design alternatives developed at the workshop did show high end office in that location.)*
- Where is Thornton Creek on this site plan? Also, how would Link be extended further north? *(An extension would likely be aerial over Northgate Way alongside the freeway to 145th.)*
- Are any other areas along this whole Northgate Link alignment subject to possible future widening by WSDOT? *(Possibly something at 80th where they might need three lanes with full shoulder widths. And at 92nd.)*

No formal action was taken at the conclusion of the briefing, however Cheryl outlined a process by which LRRP can work with the Planning Commission to prepare a joint comment letter on the SEIS during the public comment period.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.